



Conducting a Wayside Site Visit

Introduction

The site visit is key to wayside exhibit development. Wayside exhibits are one component in the park's mix of media so that the park's story is parceled according to each medium's strengths. The site visit is the opportunity to survey the entire park for an overview of significant features, to determine how individual sites fit into the visitor-use patterns, tour roads, and trails, and to observe how visitors use, or ignore, existing interpretive media. Too many wayside exhibits can overburden the visitor, too few may be a lost opportunity for a meaningful connection between the visitor and the resource.

Preparing for the site visit

Plan the site visit: Develop a day-by-day schedule to include individual site evaluation, team meetings, and research of park's graphic and reference resources. Coordinate schedule with project team members.

Review the wayside exhibit medium: Review the wayside exhibit development process, the advantages and limitations of wayside exhibits, intended audiences, site accessibility considerations, and the preventative maintenance and exhibit replacement schedule.

Research the park story: Become familiar with park legislation, planning documents, other interpretive media, and the park story. Define roles and responsibilities. Clarify expectations for all team members including communication channels.

Define expectations: Make sure all expectations are realistic especially in budget and schedule forecasts.

Identify partners: List all that have a role in the project identifying their degree of involvement and any responsibilities.

Parkwide Analysis

Review visitor use: Observe and note visitor-use patterns, tour roads, and trails, (whether planned or social paths). Observe and note how visitors use, or ignore, existing interpretive media.

Site-by-site analysis

Evaluate site: Determine the best location for each wayside exhibit driven by site-specific features or events, available graphics, interpretive significance and meanings, visitor flow, and accessibility; all conditions must be evaluated carefully since the success of each individual wayside exhibit is directly related to how well these elements work together.

Determine panel materials: Based on factors such as weather, potential vandalism, elevation, ultraviolet exposure, and the relative permanence of the information to be conveyed, determine the panel material appropriate for each site. Take note of any custom installation needs, including measurements and photos.

Identify landscape feature: Determine the wayside exhibits' direction of view using a compass reading or description of the site, and the landscape feature that is the point of focus for each site. Determine wayside exhibit locations that enhance the opportunity for visitors to make a meaningful connections to the resources without interfering with or cluttering the landscape.

Site-by-site continued

Establish message: Ensure that the appropriate interpretive message is identified for each site and that it is specific to a particular landscape feature.

Determine base structure: Assess landscape conditions to determine appropriate base styles. Take note of any custom base and installation needs, including site-specific measurements and photographs.

Determine site conditions: Evaluate each wayside exhibit location for safety and accessibility. Identify any landscaping or site hardening work that is required.

Review graphics: Review an initial selection of graphics in hand or based on knowledge of what is available to inform the on-site discussion.

Prepare thumbnails: Develop pencil roughs on-site to facilitate a discussion that results in a visual representation of the interpretive ideas. The roughs will be the catalyst for refining the discussion and the basis for creating the Wayside Exhibit Proposal.

Shoot site photos: Take site photos in the direction of view of each wayside exhibit with a marker showing where each exhibit will be installed. Shoot additional images to document unique or unusual site or resource conditions.

Document discussions: Take notes on all discussions reflecting ideas, reasons for paths-not-taken, and decisions.

On-site research

Identify park resources: Identify reference materials and bibliographies. Talk with park staff to determine sources for subject-matter expertise. Review park graphic collections and sources for any additional graphics located off-site. Gather reference material for proposed illustrations and maps. Meet with maintenance staff regarding any special siting requirements and gather information necessary for custom wayside exhibit base construction drawings.

Identify partner resources: Meet establish connections to local historical societies, museums or other relevant partners; engage subject-matter experts for developing and refining wayside exhibit content.

Close-out documentation

Representative thumbnails: Based on notes and decisions made during the site-by-site analysis, refine thumbnails as necessary for review at close-out meeting with park.

Trip summary: Present brief summary of site visit issues for discussion at close-out meeting.

Hold close-out meeting: Review objectives of the site visit and decisions made. Identify any outstanding issues. Review exhibit materials selection, installation, and maintenance issues. Review schedule, budget, and the next steps of the project.